



Oulder Hill Community School and Language College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105840
Local Authority Rochdale
Inspection number 287346
Inspection dates 29–30 November 2006
Reporting inspector Patrick Geraghty HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Hudsons Walk
School category	Community		Rochdale
Age range of pupils	11–18		Lancashire OL11 5EF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01706 645522
Number on roll (school)	1335	Fax number	01706 648404
Number on roll (6th form)	135		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Hillary Tyers
		Headteacher	Mrs Margret Dudley
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	29–30 November 2006	287346

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Oulder Hill is a large mixed comprehensive school with some 1400 pupils on roll, including 135 in the sixth form. The school is a specialist language college.

The school draws from Rochdale and the surrounding area, embracing a wide range of social backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, about 20%, is just above the national average.

The school is a multi-ethnic community. A third of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups, mainly Asian. About 55% of sixth formers are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils on the register of special educational needs is below average as is that of pupils with formal statements of needs. The attainment of pupils entering the school in Year 7 is just above average for children of this age.

At the time of the inspection the school was in the middle of an extensive PFI refurbishment and rebuilding programme. This has led to significant daily disruption. The new headteacher has been in post ten months and has had to establish systems to tackle outstanding areas of concern.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. Standards achieved throughout the school are, however, inconsistent and that is why achievement and standards overall are only satisfactory. The school acknowledges the need to improve the academic progress of pupils in a number of subject areas and to develop intervention strategies to improve consistency in the quality of teaching. The current satisfactory teaching needs to become more varied and lively. Significant improvement has occurred in English, mathematics and to a lesser extent science.

The school campus is undergoing an extensive re-building programme. The school's financial difficulties have been successfully tackled by the head teacher and governors. Generally the school presents a well ordered environment and a welcoming community, inclusive of all, and respectful of different cultures. Behaviour is generally good and any cases of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively.

The curriculum is satisfactory. However, the school acknowledge that it requires broadening to meet more fully the needs of all pupils. Plans are in place to establish a wide range of external partnerships and community links. Pupils have a wide range of sports and recreational activities which are also offered to the larger community in the evenings and at weekends. There is insufficient use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. The modern foreign languages specialist college status is not having any discernable impact on the school.

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are satisfactory as is the attention paid to their personal development and well-being. New procedures have improved support and careers and progression guidance. Pupils praise the good relationships they have with staff and the support they receive.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head teacher and her newly appointed senior managers share a self-critical approach to their work and are the driving force for improvement. They recognise the need to improve the analysis and evaluation of performance and targeted action planning in the school self-evaluation. Not all managers and staff are enthusiastically embracing new procedures and quality assurance systems. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school judges the sixth form to be satisfactory and inspectors agree with this judgment. The sixth form curriculum is narrow and focused on GCE AS and A-levels. The deputy headteacher overseeing the sixth form is newly appointed and has affected much change in a limited period of time. Quality assurance, effective tracking and monitoring of student progress were underdeveloped before September 2006. Too many students were enrolled on courses that they were not suited for and subsequently retention rates between GCE AS and A-level were poor. Enrolment procedures have been tightened. Leadership and management in the sixth form are now effective.

Students do well at GCE A-level but less well at GCE AS level. Progress at GCE A-level is good. Students speak positively about relationships with staff. Guidance and induction procedures have been improved. Student progress is now tracked with regular feedback from tutors. Students praise the good relationships they have with staff and the helpful support they receive. They value the increased focus on monitoring progress and target setting. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school is aware of where further improvements can be made.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve rates of pupil progress in a number of subjects.
- Improve the consistency in the quality of teaching and learning and promote the sharing of best practice.
- Make better use of ICT across the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning.
- Ensure that modern foreign languages specialist college status has an impact on the development of the school.
- Improve the quality of self-evaluation through the analysis and evaluation of performance and targeted action planning for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils' progress and achievement are only satisfactory overall because the quality of provision in different subject areas is inconsistent. The majority of the pupils enter the school in Year 7 having achieved standards just above the national average. Pupils make good progress in English and mathematics and satisfactory progress in science. However, in a number of subjects such as modern foreign languages, progress and standards are inconsistent. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 2005 standards in English, mathematics and science were average but in 2006 they were much improved and above national averages. Overall, there is a trend of gradual improvement and pupils are making better progress from Year 9 to Year 10 than they have done in the recent past.

Standards in Key Stage 4 have shown a gradually improving trend in recent years. In 2005 GCSE results were broadly average. In 2006 they improved significantly in a number of subjects, especially English and mathematics. In 2006, 60% of pupils attained five or more A* to C grades. The school sets challenging targets and were close to achieving them in 2006. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same satisfactory progress as other pupils. Overall, girls' attainment is significantly higher than that of boys.

Students in the sixth form make good progress at GCE A level. Results at GCE A-level demonstrated improvement in 2006 to the national average. The school recognises that results at GCE AS level at 80% are below the national average and require improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well being are satisfactory. Attendance has improved as a result of the establishment of successful monitoring procedures and is now in line with the national average. Behaviour is usually satisfactory. Most pupils enjoy school and are aware of the wide range of staff they can approach if they need help. Pupils say that there are few incidents of bullying and when it occurs it is dealt with quickly and effectively.

Pupils feel that their voice is heard through the school councils and that they have the opportunity to take on extra responsibilities such as membership of the student forum. Recently they have had the opportunity to meet with representative from a special school to discuss and look at proposals for their new joint learning campus. Pupils are offered the opportunity to train for the sports leader award to work with primary pupils. Pupils appreciate the increasing food options available and benefit from appropriate PE provision and extra-curricular sporting activities. New policies and procedures are beginning to have an impact on the quality of tutorial provision. Pupils are developing an understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural elements through assemblies, tutorial periods and skills for life lessons. Pupils' preparation for the world of work, previously limited to careers guidance and work experience, is now being enhanced by developing enterprise activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It is better in areas such as English, mathematics and science, where there have been focused strategies to improve teaching over a period of time. These have resulted in much improved examination results and student achievement.

In the better lessons pupils are motivated and engaged. When teaching is good, lessons have a fast pace and pupils are challenged to achieve well through involvement in varied and stimulating activities. In the better lessons pupils take responsibility for their own learning, for example, through presentation, games and individual research. Targets are set and monitored and there are high expectations of pupils' work and involvement in learning. In the weaker lessons teachers are not prepared to be adventurous in seeking to challenge and motivate their pupils. Consequently, some pupils, particularly boys and those of higher ability are not pushed to achieve the standards of which they are capable.

There is limited sharing of good practice. A new, whole-school policy on teaching and learning recognizes the need to share best practice in order to raise the expectations of teachers to be more ambitious for their pupils. There is only limited use of information technology to enhance teaching and learning across the curriculum.

There is an improving picture in teachers' use of assessment. Pupils are aware of the targets set for them in some subjects and teachers are beginning to track these for improvement against previous work. The best marking informs pupils of what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school offers a satisfactory but improving curriculum. The curriculum is beginning to be enriched with enterprise activities. However, the school acknowledges the need to extend vocational and pathways provision particularly for those pupils who are less motivated by more traditional courses. Plans are in place to improve the flexibility and breadth of the present narrow curriculum in Years 10 and 11. The school is adapting provision for those pupils who have learning difficulties and building on the provision of work-attachments and programmes aimed at developing skills for later life. The school is not doing enough with its modern foreign language college status to enrich the curriculum. A good range of extra-curricular activities contributes to pupils' enjoyment and to their personal development. Pupils talked positively about the opportunities in sport and in the variety of team games available.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are in place and understood by staff. Induction activities help pupils in their move from primary school. Pupils are given guidance when choosing options and making post 16 choices and progression rates are good at over 90%. The school is now developing systems to track pupils' progress more consistently across all subjects and set targets which are discussed in detail on review days.

The school liaises with a large number of external agencies. Pupils with specific needs are supported well by a developing team of specialist staff. Learners in Year 7 to 9 who are at risk are referred to "The Bridge" where individual intervention work improves their self-esteem and approaches to work. At Key Stage 4, there is also individual intervention for those pupils for whom traditional GCSE courses are not appropriate. Pupils with learning difficulties and those whose first language is not English are supported well. There is some provision for the more able. However, the school recognises the need for this to be further developed. Links with parents through reports and parents evenings are satisfactory. Guidance and induction procedures in

the sixth form have been improved. Student progress is now tracked with regular feedback from tutors.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new head teacher has a clear vision for the school's development. She has identified the major areas where improvement is needed, with particular focus on raising standards. In this, she is soundly supported by her newly appointed senior leaders and the governing body. There are already some early signs of success. For example, there has already been an improvement in pupils' 2006 national examination and test performance in several subjects.

In her short period of tenure, the head teacher has reduced a substantive budget deficit to a situation in which the school will be in budget by the end of the current academic year. She has also reduced the twenty-two outstanding audit requirements to two both of which will be resolved in the near future. The new leaders and managers have, furthermore contended very well with moving the school forward in the difficult conditions arising out of major building work to the school premises. Since September 2006, there has been effective management of the sixth form and pupils and staff express much greater confidence in the potential outcomes in terms of student achievement and enjoyment. The school recognizes that its self-evaluation form lacks sufficient analysis and evaluation of performance and targeted action planning for improvement. There is little evidence that it has been shared with staff.

Some middle management is good, however there are variable standards. The best examples are characterized by the implementation of thorough new procedures and quality assurance systems. Where this has been done, it has led to improvement in pupils' achievement and standards. Some middle managers, however, have not yet enthusiastically embraced these changes, and their staff are not held sufficiently accountable for quality and outcomes.

The governing body contributes usefully in a number of ways. For example, members understand the strategic issues concerned with the school's finances. However, governors' probing of the school's weaker aspects is limited. The improvements in standards in key subjects, together with the clear signs of early impact of the new strategies, indicate that there is a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school recently. Many of you gave up your time to talk with us about your work, life in the school and all the activities you do. We enjoyed taking with you and appreciated your time and comments.

These are the main finding from the inspection.

You enjoy many of your lessons, particularly when you know that you are improving and learning. However, some of you are not reaching the standards that you are capable of. You can play an important part in this by working with your teachers and helping them to improve your work.

There is some good teaching in the school and in these lessons you respond well to the teachers' high expectations and you make good progress. You are doing well in English and mathematics. However this is not the case across all of the school. In some lessons you are not being given work which really stretches you or encourages you to enjoy learning, achieve well and progress.

Some of you are aware of your targets in subjects and know what you have to do to improve. However, this is not always the case. Teachers need to set you realistic targets and keep track of how well you are doing.

The teachers and support staff care for you and give you satisfactory guidance. Generally your behaviour is good and you agree that the school is a safe and enjoyable place to be. You enjoy a wide range of extra activities including sports.

The main points which the staff and governors need to improve are:

- ensure that your examination results improve and that you make the progress that you are capable of across all subjects
- ensure that more teaching is good and that you are set challenging targets to improve performance
- make sure that there is a greater use of technology across all subjects
- enable you all to benefit from your school's status as a modern foreign language college.

On behalf of the inspection team I wish you well for your future education.